

Approved For Release 2004/10/28 : CIA-RDP80R01720R001100070015-3

# U.S. Plan Fails to Wipe Out VC Cadre

Washington Post

14 December 1971

(F) SVN: PHOENIX

By Peter Osnos

Washington Post Foreign Service

SAIGON, Dec. 13 — The Phoenix program, devised four years ago by the CIA as the way to wipe out the Vietcong's political infrastructure, remains today one of the most notable failures of the war.

This is the view expressed by many senior members of the U.S. establishment here, sometimes in the boldest possible terms. "It's a lousy failure," one top-echelon American said loudly at a reception the other night.

Despite the recognized importance to the Saigon government's future of eliminating the Vietcong's clandestine political apparatus, it is apparently no longer considered an achievable goal.

The Vietcong infrastructure consists of enemy agents responsible for recruiting, collecting taxes, spreading propaganda, infiltrating legitimate groups and generally undermining government influence. The cadre of about 70,000 called VCI's are homegrown and deeply rooted.

This summer the U.S. and

South Vietnamese officials decided to offer bounties as high as \$11,000 for high-ranking VCI's. The plan was never carried out, sources said, because it was realized that it wouldn't work.

"The Vietnamese are never going to turn their own people in," said an American with many years of experience in Vietnam, "and they certainly won't take sides politically until the outcome of the war is absolutely clear."

"Survival (in South Vietnam) has often meant and largely still means sitting on the fence," explained one young official.

#### Advisers Withdrawn

For some months now, American military advisers to the program have been gradually withdrawn, officially as part of the overall phaseout. A small complement of men from the Central Intelligence Agency will remain.

But considering the importance attached to Phoenix as recently as a year ago and the fact that only a few hundred Americans were involved even at the peak, the pullout at this stage is seen by many observers as an admission that there is simply very little more that can be done.

"The military didn't know how to advise the program and the Vietnamese didn't want to learn," said an American civilian who has watched Phoenix closely.

1. True: Today's Phung Hoang (PH) program is derivative from the Infrastructure Intelligence Collection and Exploitation program devised by the Station at Ambassador Komer's request in 1967.
2. There is strong contrary evidence, including VC documents citing the damages inflicted on the infrastructure by the Phung Hoang program.
3. True: MACV/CORDS did sponsor the bounty system and later decided to drop it. The GVN has apparently decided to retain it on its own initiative.

4. False:



The U.S. military which assumed complete financial and other management support of PH on 1 July 1969 has had 650-700 officers and enlisted men assigned to the program. The present U.S. military complement of 504 is to be withdrawn in phases by 1 July 1972. (Present plans being discussed by the Station and CORDS would retain a truncated 30-man U.S. military advisory complement attached to the program through at least the end of 1972.)

25X1

Official - Vietnamization. figures show that about 20,000 agents are "neutralized" (killed, captured or rallied to the government side) each year. But Americans acknowledge that practically all of this probably inflated figure were low-level village and hamlet operatives and the basic leadership still remains.

A very small percentage of even these are killed or captured because Phoenix intelligence ferreted them out. What usually happens is that persons rounded up in routine military operations are subsequently listed as VCIs.

"Statistics show that for every one neutralization of a previously identified VCI we are neutralizing four that were not previously identified," the senior American adviser in Binhduong Province wrote recently.

Phoenix (known properly by its Vietnamese name Phuong Hoang -- all-seeing

bird) has been in trouble from the start. It was drawn up by the CIA as a "systematic effort at intelligence coordination and exploitation" -- a way to prevent clumsy overlap. It was turned over to the Vietnamese in 1968.

Agents were to be identified, apprehended and punished by local authorities.

War critics in the United States promptly attacked Phoenix as a counterterror organization, utilizing assassination and torture as its principal tools. Periodically, there were reports on such abuses.

These reports, along with the cloak and dagger aura of CIA involvement and specially trained and paid Vietnamese agents known as PRU (provincial reconnaissance units), gave the program a sinister reputation that overshadowed its continuing inability to accomplish the job it had been assigned.

"The most important thing about Phoenix," one official commented early in 1970, "is that it is not working."

#### Reason For Trouble

One reason frequently offered for Phoenix's troubles is that it involves an extraordinarily complex meshing of information and personnel from any number of Vietnamese military, paramilitary and civilian groups.

Leadership is nominally vested in the national police and its elite special branch. In fact, the military often predominates. The interest and personality of the province chiefs and their principal aides are also instrumental.

Information is gleaned from a variety of sources, including armed sources, ganda teams, revolutionary development cadre and plain villagers. The data is collected and maintained at district and province intelligence and interrogation centers.

Raids are entrusted to the PRU, the CIA-sponsored squads who are the action arm of Phoenix. Sometimes militia units and the police are also involved. American helicopters are used frequently to ferry the PRU.

6. Neutralization figures for 1968, 69 and 70 are 15,776, 17,534 and 22,541. 1971 figures are not available.

7. True: The American side has tried from the beginning to remain in an advisory support and liaison capacity to PH which was formerly chartered as an official program by the GVN in December 1967.

8. Misleading: PRU is only one of the many action arms of the PH program. By GVN charter primary responsibility for PH lies with the National Police, with the Special Police Branch and the Police Field Force singled out as the two components charged with eliminating the VC Infrastructure.

**'Undisciplined Country'**

9. In cases where wanted VCs are apprehended, trials are conducted by provincial security councils, made up of the province chief, various police and military officials and whom ever the province chief selects.

In practice, all this turns out to be a haphazard business. Among other things, officials said, suspects frequently bribe their way out, province and police officials misuse their authority to settle grievances and innocent people are jailed or worse.

10. In Angiang, the country's most pacified province, a man was recently truncheoned to death before it was discovered that he had been picked up by mistake. The killer was an enlisted man in the militia assigned to the local intelligence unit.

The case was reported in the Vietnamese press and informed U.S. sources said a sergeant had acted on his own without authority and would be tried later.

How many of these incidents go undiscovered is anybody's guess. "This is an undisciplined country at war," said a high-ranking U.S. pacification official, "and Phoenix is about what you'd have to expect."

9. False: The GVN on 2 August 1971 fixed the composition of the Provincial Security Committees which decides the disposition of cases as the Province Chief, the Public Prosecutor, and the Provincial Council Member (elected). This is a change from the previous 7-men committees which the military predominated.

10. This incident was reported in the local press. Local Hoa Hao politicians used it for their own purposes in a series of demonstrations. We have no independent reporting on this subject.

11. Please note that similar expressions of doubt about the effectiveness of the PH program were raised in a New York Times article of 26 October 1971 (attached).

*BEST COPY  
AVAILABLE*

# Many Refugees Neutral About Vietcong

## U.S. Advisers Voicing Doubts on Saigon's Desire to Push Operation Phoenix

Special to The New York Times

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Oct. 25 — Many American advisers in the provinces are voicing doubt about the willingness of Vietnamese officials to carry out the controversial program known as Operation Phoenix, whose purpose is to weed out Vietcong political leaders.

"In this province the Government will not allocate even a pencil, paperclip or piece of paper on a regular basis to the program," according to Russell L. McDaniel, senior American adviser in Phuyen, on the central coast.

"It would seem that the problem is common," he said in a confidential report on operations in Military Region II, a coastal and highland area north of Saigon.

"The low quality of personnel assigned to the program must also be considered some of the other than 'coincidental' factors," he added.

### Who Is Being Fostered?

He said it was the propaganda of the Government in Saigon to withhold support from the Phoenix Program, but, he added, "certainly the United States Government should not be misled by the Government of South Vietnam into thinking it is fooling the Americans."

The Phoenix Program, conceived by the Central Intelligence Agency in 1967, was turned over to the South Vietnamese in principle the previous year. Americans have since then pushed the program, providing advisers and funds as a prelude to many means of seeking out the Vietcong.

Since South Vietnam has not given the program the emphasis some American officials feel it should have, they are considering a reorganization of the program and its basic concepts in the hope of salvaging it.

Lack of interest in or distaste for the program is limited to Vietnamese in Military Region II.

### Lag Traced to Saigon

"There seems to be a decrease in the interest and emphasis in the program," wrote the senior American adviser in Quangnam Province, which is in the northernmost military region of South Vietnam. He traced the declining interest to Saigon, where the failure to stress the program's importance has resulted in the removal of many Vietnamese, once vitally involved in it. Men trained exclusively for the program are being removed with-

out replacement, the report on Quangnam said.

The senior province official in Bac Lieu Province, on the southern coast, reported that the Phoenix program was ineffective against low-level Vietcong, but ineffective against the "hard core" of the leadership.

### Experimental Rewards

Last August, in an attempt to bolster the program, the United States and the South Vietnamese Government decided to begin experimental cash rewards in four provinces, paying up to the equivalent of \$11,000 for certain key leaders. It is doubtful that the rewards are effective.

Last May the senior American adviser in Thuy Phay Province, 70 miles west of Saigon, said the primary reason for the lack of success was "the inherent distrust" of people for inducing relatives, friends or people with political connections.

### Quota For Each Province

Under the Phoenix program, each province receives a quota of Vietnamese to be "non-States Government should not be misled by the Government of South Vietnam into thinking it is fooling the Americans."

The quota system had to be revised by the Central Intelligence Agency in 1967, when it was turned over to the South Vietnamese. "Vietnam is a country where quality is more important than quantity," he said. "Vietnam is a country where quality is more important than quantity."

South Vietnam has not given the program the emphasis some American officials feel it should have, they are considering a reorganization of the program and its basic concepts in the hope of salvaging it.

UNCLASSIFIED		CONFIDENTIAL		SECRET	
<b>OFFICIAL ROUTING SLIP</b>					
TO	NAME AND ADDRESS		DATE	INITIALS	
1	SAVA 6 F19			m	
2	ATTN: O'CARROLL				
3					
4					
5					
6					
ACTION		DIRECT REPLY		PREPARE REPLY	
APPROVAL		DISPATCH		RECOMMENDATION	
COMMENT		FILE		RETURN	
CONCURRENCE		INFORMATION		SIGNATURE	
<b>Remarks:</b>  <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><i>3PH</i></p> <p><i>Phongix / Phong Hong</i></p> <p><i>P.H.</i></p> </div>					
FOLD HERE TO RETURN TO SENDER					
FROM: NAME, ADDRESS AND PHONE NO.				DATE	
<div style="text-align: center;"> <p><i>Cluno</i></p> <p>UNC</p> </div>				<div style="text-align: center;"> <p><i>5818</i></p> <p>CONFIDENTIAL</p> </div>	
				<div style="text-align: center;"> <p><i>Smith</i></p> <p>SECRET</p> </div>	

STAT

STAT